

Two lives cut short

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Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

Celebrants took seats along the mural for the rededication festivities Sunday afternoon.

Mural's rededication ceremony brings a terrible irony to light

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WATSONVILLE

THEY HAD little in common, save for identical first names.

But Sunday's Mona Lisa Mural Celebration in Watsonville was dedicated to the memory of two young men whom friends and family say were headed toward fulfilling lives that ended way too soon.

The event featured a memorial service for Alejandro "Alex" Lopez Jr., the Watsonville teen who was shot to death in an apparent random attack Aug. 23 in front of the Kennedy Youth Center, just a few blocks away from the Mona Lisa restaurant where loved ones mourned Sunday.

The young man's father, Alejandro Lopez Sr., made a brief address to the crowd. He denounced gang violence and advocated educating youth.

"I feel I was able to say what I wanted, even though it was very hard," Lopez said. "I wanted to reach out to young people and tell them 'don't waste your life.'"



Carmen Leon, left, is one of the original artists who worked on the mural painted

along with Vicki Detrovich and Espinosa, said her final conversation with the aspiring artist was chilling. The three held an impromptu celebration of their work, sharing a mutual admiration. She asked him how he imagined death.

"He said he expected to die suddenly," Leon said. "And the next day, he died."

Leon said she grieved the loss of both young men.

"This is the realization of life potential cut short," she said. "After all these years, things have not changed ... it is disheartening."

Alejo said the shooting of Lopez represented a terrible irony. The past two weekends before his death, Alejo helped coordinate two successful anti-violence events in downtown Watsonville that drew a substantial community response.

"It was very discouraging to deal with news like that," he said. "It just shows that we still have a lot of work to do."

Lopez was a Cabrillo College student with aspirations of becoming a paramedic. His family said he was an upbeat kid who